THE

TABLET OF CEBES:

OR, A

PICTURE of HUMAN LIFE.

A

P O E M,

COPIED FROM

The GREEK of *CEBES* the *THEBAN.*

By a GENTLEMAN of *OXFORD.*

O X F O R D:
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A POEM,

CODED FROM

THE GREEK OF CERES THE THEBAN.

BY A GENTLEMAN OF OXFORD.

OXFORD:

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THE

TABLET of CEBES.

The Perſons who ſpeak in this Dialogue, are a Stranger *who comes to viſit the Temple of Saturn, and a Theban* Sage *who explains a Tablet found there.*

WHILE ſuppliant Crouds, at Saturn's hallow'd Shrine,
With coſtly Gifts invok'd the Pow'r Divine:
And each as Fancy, or as Taſte inſpir'd,
The various Works of various Arts admir'd,
Well could my Eyes with cool Regard behold
The temper'd Colours, and the molten Gold:
High, on the Temple's Front a Tablet ſtood,
The Plate unpoliſh'd, and the Sculpture rude;
Nor Camp, nor Town, the Artiſt's Hand had wrought,
But veil'd in Emblems his myſterious Thought:
Three circling Walls three ſpacious Courts encloſe,
Each within each at equal Diſtance roſe;
Unnumber'd Crouds approach the outward Gate,
Warm with young Blood, in Ignorance elate;
Within the Gate a Female Tribe was ſeen,
Gaudy their Dreſs, and wanton was their Mien:

At the firſt Entrance ſtood a bearded Sage,
Whoſe Looks expreſs'd the kind Concern of Age,
Anxious to check the headſtrong Rage of Youth,
By early Leſſons of inſtructive Truth.

Attentive o'er and o'er I view'd the Piece,
And with Attention found my Doubts increaſe;
When lo! a Sire, who mark'd my deep Suſpenſe,
Unravel'd thus the Tablet's myſtic Senſe.

SAGE.

Bluſh not, my Friend, whoe'er thou art, to find
Thy Thoughts perplex'd, thy wav'ring Judgment blind;
A Thirſt for Knowledge in thy Doubts I ſee,
Propoſe ingenuous all thy Wiſh to me;
Oft have I heard the Inventor's Self explain
What many Learn'd have ſought, but ſought in vain.
From foreign Realms the moral Sculptor came,
Still Thebes records, and ſtill reveres his Name,
(Ah! much I wiſh that this my native Land
Could ſuch a Work produce from ſuch an Hand)
One, who the Seeds of Virtue early ſown
With Culture nurs'd, and made the Fruits his own:
Strong was his Judgment, and his Taſte refin'd,
Learning enrich'd, and Prudence rul'd his Mind,
Mature in Wiſdom, e'er advanc'd in Age,
He ſhone in wond'ring Thebes a beardleſs Sage;

With Skill peculiar leading heedleſs Youth
Through Fable's flow'ry Path to uſeful Truth:
Such once He was, who rais'd this hallow'd Shrine,
And on this Tablet wrought his deep Deſign.

STRANGER.

Though now, kind Sire, the Stroke of envious Fate
Forbids his Tongue the Moral to relate,
Yet think what Pleaſure in your Boſom grew
When he reveal'd the myſtic Tale to You;
Let my Impatience then recall your own,
Remove the Veil, and make the Meaning known.

SAGE.

From this Diſcovery Dangers will ariſe;
Conſider well; be curious, but be wiſe.

STRANGER.

Danger in vain ſhall my Purſuit oppoſe;
Yet ſay from whence this kind Suggeſtion roſe.

SAGE.

If on the living Tablet of the Heart
Thou grave the wholſome Precepts I impart,
Virtue her Bleſſings on thy Youth will ſhed,
And Wiſdom crown with Peace thy hoary Head;

But, ſhould'ſt thou ſtill, when Virtue points the Way,
Inactive linger, or unthinking ſtray,
Folly will ſpread, unſeen, her treach'rous Snare,
Miſguide thy Feet, and lead thee to Deſpair.
For know, the moral Problem here diſclos'd,
Like that fam'd Riddle by the Sphynx propos'd,
If rightly ſolv'd, gives Joy, and Life, and Fame,
But if neglected, Sorrow, Death and Shame:
Folly to us, like that fell Monſter, ſtill
Propounds this Queſtion, "What is Good and Ill?"
Like her, if loſt in Error's Maze we ſtray,
Darts on the Mind, and graſps the trembling Prey:
But Folly's Tortures more ſeverely flow,
Wound, yet not kill, prolong, not end our Woe.
Far happier They who ſolve her Problem right,
And drive back Folly to her native Night,
Who ſee with Scorn the vanquiſh'd Tyrant fly,
Mourn her loſt Empire, ſicken, pine, and die:
Wiſdom on them her choiceſt Bleſſings pours,
And crowns their Brows with never-fading Flow'rs.
Now cautious hear, and while you hear attend,
On this the Joys, or Woes of Life depend.

STRANGER.

Delay no more, for who can hear in vain
When ſuch the Forfeiture, or ſuch the Gain?

Bent on the Trial, I impatient wait,
Dare all th' Event, and riſque my future Fate.
Then thus the ſage Interpreter began:

SAGE.

This Tablet repreſents the *Life of Man*:
Around the Gate of Life, a youthful Train
Impatient pants to reach the crouded Plain;
To Them the *Genius of Mankind* diſplays
The Plan of Life, and marks its various Ways;
Bids them the narrow Path of Virtue take,
And the broad, beaten Road of Vice forſake.

STRANGER.

Say, by what Clue he guides the Steps of Youth
Through all the winding Wild, to diſtant Truth.

SAGE.

See, where enthron'd amidſt a Court of Fools,
With winning Softneſs vain *Deluſion* rules:
Gay are her Looks, and form'd for wanton Joy,
Fair to allure, alluring to deſtroy;
Smiling ſhe fills th' intoxicating Bowl,
And deals around the Draught that lulls the Soul.

STRANGER.

What deadly Drugs this fatal Draught compoſe?

SAGE.

From Error's Spring the pois'nous Water flows,
Which chills the Mind, and Reaſon's Strength ſubdues:

STRANGER.

Can none more wiſe her offer'd Cup refuſe?

SAGE.

None: All muſt drink, the Wiſe in Time abſtain,
But greedy Fools the whole vaſt Goblet drain.
See next, thoſe Nymphs, whoſe captivating Charms,
Entice the Stranger to their open Arms;
Who, gaily tripping in the ſportive Dance,
Retreat with Elegance, with Grace advance;
Unrivall'd Brightneſs each appears to boaſt,
Till in another's brighter Radiance loſt:
Theſe Man's *Opinions*, *Paſſions*, *Joys* expreſs,
Various their Arts; as various is their Dreſs:
Some, ſooth the Soul with Tales of promis'd Joys,
And ſpread the Glitter of their tinſel'd Toys,
Till far from Truth and Virtue's Road it ſtrays,
Perplex'd and loſt in Error's endleſs Maze.
Some, more ſincere, the wand'ring Mind direct,
The Dark enlighten, and the Weak protect.
Thrice happy He, who, with diſcerning Eyes,
Sees Folly clad in Beauty's thin Diſguiſe;

Who, not ſeduc'd by Fancy's tranſient Blaze,
Walks on to Truth by Reaſon's ſteady Rays.

STRANGER.

What means that ſightleſs Dame whoſe Form and Air
The wild Emotions of her Mind declare,
With Wings extended on a Globe ſhe ſtands,
And ſcatters Treaſures from her open Hands?

SAGE.

Her Name is *Fortune*; her capricious Sway
The Great, the Proud, the Rich, the Strong obey;
She to our Prayers is deaf, to Merit blind,
The Globe reſembles her unſteady Mind;
To-day ſhe ſnatches what laſt Night ſhe gave,
And he who ſleeps a King, may wake a Slave.
Alike a Friend, alike a Foe to all,
And careleſs where her caſual Favours fall,
With wanton Hand around in Air ſhe flings
Preferments, Titles, Laurels, Sceptres, Strings;
Her ſuppliant Fools the flying Toys purſue,
Poſſeſs with Rapture, or with Envy view:
One graſps a Sceptre, one a Lawrel Bough,
That mounts a Throne, This crowns his haughty Brow;
But ſhould ſome Force ſuperior to their own
Subdue the Hero, or the King dethrone,

Stripp'd of the Wreaths of Fame, the Pomp of Pow'r,
They curſe the Minion of a luckier Hour.

Pleaſure's fair Handmaids with diſſembled Smiles
Spread round the *ſecond Gate* their wanton Wiles,
Hence on the Dupes of Fortune fix their Eyes,
And mark who catches ev'ry random Prize;
And whilſt he bears the glitt'ring Toys away,
Watch for his Spoils, and lead his Feet aſtray:
For him the Harlot's ſoothing Arts employ,
Smiles without Mirth, and Raptures without Joy,
Here *Luſt* her Eyes in liquid Glances rolls,
Here fluſh'd *Intemp'rance* quaffs her countleſs Bowls;
Her Heaps of Gold inſatiate *Av'rice* ſhews,
And broods o'er Treaſures which ſhe dares not uſe;
Here *Flatt'ry* maſk'd in Truth's fair-ſeeming Veil,
Inſinuates ſlily her bewitching Tale.

By them ſeduc'd to *Pleaſure's* painted Bow'rs,
He roves at large, and crops the ſhort-liv'd Flow'rs;
Runs blindly on, by Whim or Paſſion led,
Or idly ſleeps on Sloth's inglorious Bed;
In vain Purſuits his waking Hours employs,
And feaſts at Night on viſionary Joys.
But when abaſh'd at Reaſon's riſing Light,
The ſhadowy Phantoms vaniſh from his Sight,

Alarm'd, aſham'd, he mourns his hapleſs Fate,
Too ſoon deluded, and convinc'd too late.
Sweet Muſic ſooths his raviſh'd Ear no more,
Now, big with Storms, the hollow Tempeſts roar,
Diſſolv'd in Air the pleaſing Landſchape dies,
Thick Clouds deſcend, and grizly Spectres riſe:
From the dark Manſions of her loathſome Cell,
Where wrapt in Night her ſad Attendants dwell,
Stalk'ſ ſlow-pac'd *Puniſhment* with Brow ſevere,
Conſcious he flies, and ſtarts to find her near;
She ſtill purſues him with her 'vengeful Rod,
And drags him trembling to her dark Abode.

STRANGER.

What Captives here, all hopeleſs and forlorn
By ſad Example teach the Wretch to mourn?

SAGE.

The firſt is *Silent Grief* in Tears expreſt,
Next frantic *Anguiſh* beats his heaving Breaſt,
Behind them *Melancholy* wan with Care,
Walks Hand in Hand with comfortleſs *Deſpair*.
In theſe dread Manſions ever doom'd to ſtay,
He groans the dull Remains of Life away;
Unleſs *Repentance*, Heav'n's own faireſt Child,
Known by her downcaſt Eyes, and Aſpect mild,

Shall looſe the Bondage of his galling Chain,
And gently lead him into Life again;
With Her, he meaſures back the Vale of Youth,
Where Vice ſeduc'd him from the Path of Truth;
Each tranſient Meteor which miſled his Eyes,
Loſt in her Beams of purer Luſtre dies.
She forms his Judgment, and directs his Choice
When grave-rob'd *Science* mimics *Wiſdom*'s Voice:
Science, deluſive Fair! whoſe wily Art
Plays on the Ear, but oft corrupts the Heart:
Supreme ſhe reigns o'er every Sect and Age,
For Her, a War of Words Logicians wage.
For Her the Lyriſt ſweeps his tuneful Strings
For Her, the Bard his labour'd Numbers ſings:
For Her, the Critic o'er old Authors pores,
Expels a Letter, or a Point reſtores.
She wakes th' Aſtronomer at Midnight Hours,
And *Rhet'rick* plants for Her, her choiceſt Flowers.

STRANGER.

Methinks I ſee that pamper'd Dame again,
Intemp'rance, follow'd by her giddy Train.

SAGE.

Drunk with *Deluſion*'s Cup they ſtill advance,
And *Folly* joins th' Opinion's mazy Dance,
Nor ceaſe their Sports, till *Wiſdom* from the Soul
Diſpels the Vapours of the fatal Bowl.

STRANGER.

Alas! how hard to ſhun the ſoothing Wiles
Of youthful Vice, and Pleaſure's ſilken Toils:
Turn then our Eyes from this deceitful Plain,
And ſhew where *Truth*, and *genuine Wiſdom* reign.

SAGE.

O'er yon wide Waſte, where no gay Landſchape chears
The weary Sight, a narrow Path appears,
Sharp tangled Thorns th'untrodden Wild o'erſpread,
For few, too few, the Ways of *Wiſdom* tread:
A ſteep Aſcent the dreary Proſpect bounds,
Whoſe craggy Sides a Range of Rocks ſurrounds:
Prone o'er the Clift two Virgin Siſters ſtand,
Who raiſe the weary with Aſſiſtant Hand;
Sweet *Temp'rance* ſmiling in the Bloom of Youth,
And *Perſeverance* ſteady Friend of Truth.
If onward thence we caſt our raviſh'd Eyes,
Smooth, eaſy, plain, the Road of *Wiſdom* lies,
Still more her Charms at nearer View invite,
And ev'ry Senſe is wrapt in pure Delight.

Yon flow'ry Meadows where the Silver Flood
Reflects the ruſhy Bank and pendent Wood,
Where Nature ſmiles in richeſt Verdure dreſt,
Form the third Court, *The Manſions of the Bleſt*;

Here *Happineſs* ſerene, and *ſocial Love*
With *virtuous Joys* the fleeting Hours improve.
Before the Gate a graceful Dame appears,
* In Years ſhe ſeems, though not impair'd by Years;
Fix'd on a Cube of maſſy Stone ſhe ſtands,
Two Virgin Daughters ſmiling in her Hands;
In one the Face of lively *Truth* is ſeen,
The other ſhews *Perſwaſion*'s ſofter Mien,
Offſpring of *Wiſdom:* By the maſſy Stone
The firm-fix'd Baſis of her Mind is known;
Hence are we taught that *Wiſdom* reſts ſecure,
That all her Gifts are great, and all her Joys are pure.

STRANGER.

What Gifts, what Joys?

SAGE.

Her genial Pow'r inſtils
Prudence, to ſhun, or Strength, to conquer Ills.

STRANGER.

Why then excluded from theſe Manſions fair?
For well her Merit claims Admittance there:

SAGE.

Her's is the tender Taſk to purge the Soul
From the ſtrong Poiſon of Deluſion's Bowl;

* *Pope.*

To clear the Sight of Envy's jaundic'd Eyes,
And quench the Thirſt of dropſy'd Avarice;
To cool the fev'riſh Veins of Luſt and Pride,
And bid the Paſſions throbbing Pulſe ſubſide.

STRANGER.

Yet oft I fear the Patient's froward Will
Scorns her Preſcription, and derides her Skill.

SAGE.

Let ſuch the Pangs of conſcious Guilt endure,
Who ſcorns the Med'cine, cannot hope the Cure.

STRANGER.

When Wiſdom's ſovereign Skill has purg'd the Mind,
The Judgment ſtrengthen'd, and the Taſte refin'd,
Where leads ſhe then her Ward?

SAGE.

To thoſe bleſt Plains,
Where with the kindred Virtues *Knowledge* reigns;
Artleſs their Charms; for what could Art improve,
Where all is Beauty, Elegance, and Love?
See white-rob'd *Chaſtity* with Silver Zone,
And healthful *Temp'rance* by her Bridle known;
See bluſhing *Modeſty* with ſilken Veil,
And *Juſtice* poiſing her impartial Scale:

Here *Liberty* her glorious Standard bears,
And *Fortitude* her batter'd Helmet wears:
Here *Liberality* thoſe Gifts ſupplies,
Which Fortune oft to modeſt Worth denies:
Here Hand in Hand with *Equity* appears,
Indulgent *Mercy* bath'd in tender Tears.

STRANGER.

Oh ſweet Oblivion of his Labours paſt!
But Bliſs ſo perfect, is it made to laſt?

SAGE.

Yes: here his Joys with equal Current flow,
The Virtues guard the Bleſſings they beſtow.
Led by their Care he climbs the arduous Height,
Where, as at Diſtance plac'd from vulgar Sight
A ſtrong fenc'd Caſtle crowns the craggy Brow,
Whoſe Tow'rs o'erlook the ſpacious Vale below:
Here the fair Mother of this faireſt Race,
Claſps her lov'd Virtues in her fond Embrace,
And welcomes her new Gueſt with unaffected Grace.
Her Name is *Happineſs*.

STRANGER.

Why on his Brow,
Bind they the Laurel's never-fading Bough?

What Toils has he ſuſtain'd, What Foes ſubdued?

SAGE.

Paſſion and *Vice*, and *Error*'s pois'nous Brood:
He tam'd mad *Folly*, and *Himſelf* o'ercame;

STRANGER.

Sharp was the Conflict, and well-won his Fame.
But why led back to that deluſive Way
Where once forlorn he wander'd?

SAGE.

To ſurvey
The various Woes to various Crimes aſſign'd,
The inbred Tortures of the guilty Mind:
Some, on Ambition's tow'ring Pinions ſoar,
New Regions traverſe, and new Heights explore,
Envy forbids, the Storms of Faction blow,
And whirl them giddy to the Gulph below.
Some Av'rice beckons to her ſumptuous Treat,
And ſhews the Viands ſhe forbids to eat.
Each to the ruling Paſſion doom'd a Slave,
Mourns the loſt Plan his Guardian Genius gave,
Toils, but in vain, to reach the bliſsful Hill,
Still diſappointed, miſerable ſtill.

Back through the Vale the Virtues lead their Guest,
More pure his Sight, more ſtrongly arm'd his Breaſt;
No more, athirſt for Fame, he haunts the Shores
Where *Vanity* her bubbling Current pours;
No more is caught by *Falſhood*'s painted Charms,
But claſps fair *Truth* in Tranſports to his Arms.
Enlighten'd now, by Reaſon's ſteady Ray,
No Fears alarm Him, and no Snares betray.
Safe, as within the fam'd Corycian Bow'r
Which Phœbus hallows by his preſent Pow'r:
Peace ſmooths his Bed, and Joy his Steps attends,
His Home, all Places, all Mankind his Friends.

But if again his ſcatter'd Foes unite,
Shake off their Fetters, and renew the Fight,
Yet, ſoon as Virue's Champion takes the Field,
Again ſuppreſt the Rebel Monſters yield:
He mocks the Darts of Sorrow, Want and Pain,
And Av'rice bribes Him with her Gold in vain.
Though much he labour, and though much endure,
In Virtue's Balm he knows a certain Cure.
Thus He whoſe Search the ſov'reign Herb has found
Whoſe happy Influence heals the poiſon'd Wound,
Safe on the flow'ry Bank at Noon reclines,
Where ſlily couch'd, the baſking Serpent ſhines.

STRANGER.

What means that Troop which from yon riſing Ground
Gladſome deſcends, with Wreaths of Lawrel crown'd;
Behind them others ſtalk with ſullen air,
No Joy *their* Looks beſpeak, no Crowns they wear?

SAGE.

The firſt in *Wiſdom*'s Cauſe diſtinguiſh'd ſhone,
Her foes repell'd, and made her Bliſs their own;
But they who ſlowly drag the ſervile chain,
Fled from the Field to *Senſual Luſts* again:
By them enſlav'd, they mourn their Hours away,
To pale Deſpair, and keen Remorſe a Prey;
Or mad with Rage attack the ſolid Throne
Of ſacred Wiſdom and her Pow'r diſown,
Her Subjects harraſs, and her Rites profane,
And boaſt the Gifts of lawleſs *Pleaſure*'s Reign;
For Her they live, for Her their Hours employ,
Whirl'd in tempeſtuous Turbulence of Joy.

STRANGER.

Oh ſay! e'er yet thy kind Inſtructions end,
What ſmiling Nymphs from yon fair Mount deſcend!

SAGE.

Theſe are th' *Opinions*, by whoſe Guidance taught,
The Virtuous were to Wiſdom's Entrance brought,

Their Charge resign'd, the lovely Guides retreat;

STRANGER.

Are these excluded then from Wisdom's Seat?

SAGE.

Th' Opinions may not dwell on Wisdom's Plain,
For these, rebellious, might disturb her Reign:

STRANGER.

But why return they when their Task is done?

SAGE.

To tell of Toils subdued, and Trophies won:
Then pleas'd, resume again their kind Employ,
And guide the Virtuous to the Realms of Joy.
So when a Ship with precious Cargo fraught,
Has to the destin'd Shore her Lading brought,
Soon she expands again her Canvas Wings,
Flies lightly back, and other Treasures brings.

STRANGER.

Thus far is clear; yet since the Bliss of Man
Lies in th' Observance of the moral Plan,
Which at his Birth the Guardian Genius shews,
Explain this Plan, and his Commands disclose.

SAGE.

He bids them, (and do Thou this Maxim prize)
Alike the Frowns or Smiles of Fate deſpiſe,
Be firmly good, and reſolutely wiſe.
Forbids to deem what Fortune lends, ſecure,
Or view with extaſy her painted Lure;
Forbids to kneel to her capricious ſway,
To mourn her Abſence, or implore her Stay;
Leſt the fond Fav'rite of a former Hour,
Should fall a Victim to her fickle Pow'r,
And ſnatch'd from all ſhe promis'd, all ſhe gave,
See others ſhare his Spoils, himſelf a Slave.
" Improve, he cries, with Care, the proffer'd Loan,
" Nor, like bad Bankers, think the Wealth thine own,
" But pay with Int'reſt when the Bond demands
" What ſhe a while depoſits in thy Hands.
" Rather let Wiſdom's Gift thy Wiſh engage,
" Let this delight thy Youth, and crown thine Age,
" Her Gift is *Knowledge*: Safe on this depend,
" Thy Wealth in Poverty, in Care thy Friend.
" But chief beware of Pleaſure's wanton Wiles,
" Vain are her Joys, deceitful are her Smiles;
" Nor with *Falſe Wiſdom* fix thy laſting Reſt,
" Her Courts are but an Inn, and Thou a Gueſt:
" With *Science* here, Thou may'ſt unbend a while
" Thy weary Mind, and Life's dull Road beguile;

" Here to thy Taſte the *Genius* recommends
" What to the Mind's Refreſhment chiefly tends,
" Learning and Arts: Theſe *Plato* has defin'd
" The Curb of Youth's too refractory Mind.

STRANGER.

And is not Science then the only Clue
By which the real Wiſdom we purſue?

SAGE.

Learning, whoſe Uſe and Merit I confeſs
Is not eſſential to our Happineſs;
As, by Tranſlations from a Tongue unknown,
An Author's Meaning may be fully ſhewn,
Though in his Language various Beauties lie,
Which aſk a nicer Taſte, and keener Eye.
So may th' unletter'd learn the ſimple Rules
Of virtuous Wiſdom, unexplain'd by Schools.
And oft Experience proves the ſtudious Throng
Blindly perverſe, and obſtinately wrong:
Vain too, and impotent is Learning's Art
To frame the Manners and improve the Heart;
The Seeds of Falſhood, ſpite of all the Toil,
Like Weeds will flouriſh in the richeſt Soil;
And Vice, where Science bloom'd, ſtrike deep its Root,
Check the full Bud, and ſpoil the ripening Fruit.

STRANGER.

The Gifts of Science then we vainly prize,
If to be learned, is not to be wiſe.

SAGE.

When the dark Clouds of Prejudice and Pride
The lively Rays of Truth and Reaſon hide,
In Learning's mazy School the Pedants ſtray,
Still toil, yet wander ſtill from Wiſdom's Way,
Still, where th' Opinion's blazing Meteors riſe,
Enraptur'd follow till each Meteor dies:
But when Repentance darts her Beams ſerene,
Diſſolving Falſhood's viſionary Scene,
Wiſdom in native Beauty ſtands confeſt,
And Virtue's genial Influence warms the Breaſt.

Such is the Plan of Life our Artiſt drew,
Obſerve the Outlines, and his Plan purſue
For ſhould thy Mind inactive ſtill remain,
Vain are his Leſſons, thy Attention vain.

FINIS.